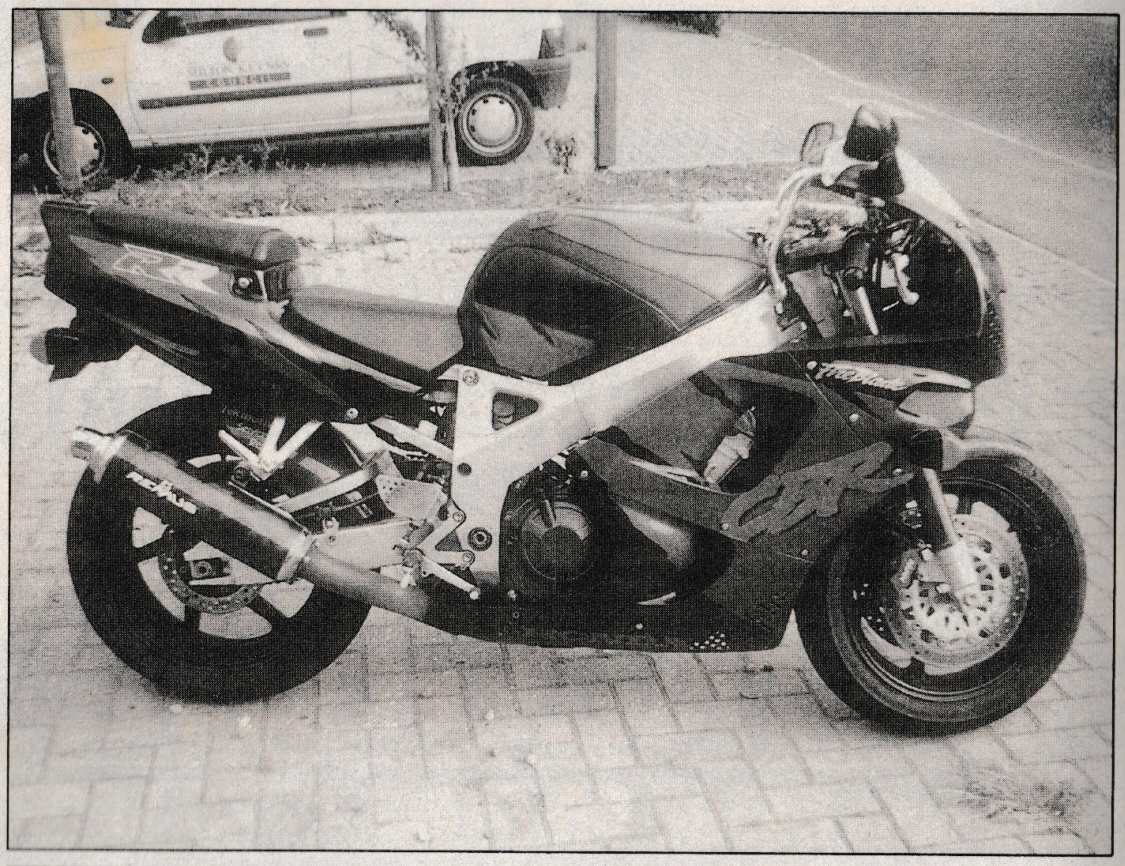

AFFORDABLE FIREBLADE?

THE HONDA FIREBLADE WAS LAUNCHED into an unsuspecting world in 1992. Yeah, it does seem ages ago! That the FireBlade is still in production and still setting standards owes as much to the original revolutionary lightweight design as it does the evolution that followed.

Although some say the FireBlade is being eclipsed by Kawasaki's ZX-9 and the Yamaha R1, even those who make that statement would admit the Blade is still capable enough to trounce or keep up, as the difference is small enough that rider ability can cover the performance gap. In reality the newer the FireBlade you buy the better it will be. And it isn't just wear and tear that will make that difference.

Changes to the frame to make it lighter, changes to engine internals to produce more power, changes to steering to give more stability... the FireBlade has been around for nearly eight years which is a lot of evolution, Mr Darwin!

There are plenty of secondhand buys to suit most pockets and loads of secondhand bits at the breakers. The FireBlade engine has seen many changes along with some to the chassis so care is needed when buying those spares. The price competition brought about by grey imports has also affected secondhand prices which are currently as low as you can expect – not so good for sellers but very nice thank you for buyers and readers of ***UBG***!

For those looking for an almost new model it will certainly be worthwhile going to a dealer and haggling over a cash purchase. The discounts available, especially if you are happy with last year's model, almost bring them into the one year-old private sale price. And the Sale of Goods Act means you can squeeze at least three months warranty from the dealer! And insist on parts AND labour.

At 180kg the FireBlade is lighter than a 916 Ducati! Did you know that? And the Honda has 126bhp to its credit which is a tad more than the Duke. All this means mega-acceleration and chuck it about all over the place dead easy handling. Which is where the

Honda FireBlade first made its reputation, and where it continues to do so. The FireBlade will deal with motorway or byway with ease. It will deliver the goods if you want to go touring, but only on your own – more of that later.

Living with a FireBlade is as easy as pie. Fuel consumption is pretty good for what is marketed as a performance bike. You should average around 45 miles to the gallon which is roughly ten miles per litre. Nice easy figure to remember – if you put 9 litres in you're OK for 90 miles. Fuel consumption will change with use with 50mpg achievable on a longer run but dropping to as low as 35mpg if your right hand gets twitchy. The 18 litres in the fuel tank then equate to 180 miles which is plenty.

The FireBlade is not perfect – no bike is...

Performance doesn't have to be at the expense of fuel consumption. An engine like the FireBlade's has to be efficient to deliver the goods and that same efficiency means it does it with less fuel.

There is plenty of choice on tyres but it pays to shop around.

Make sure the price quoted includes wheel balancing as well as fitting. An out of balance tyre spinning at three figure speeds is not only dangerous but is uncomfortable and will prematurely wear the tyre. And will they take the wheel out for you? If you can handle only 35mpg then Avon A39/40 Azara Super Sports tyres will do their best to keep your tyres stuck firmly to your favourite piece of road or any other while you stretch that wire. Of course, there is a cost – not just fuel. Expect to replace the Avons after just 1800 miles of smiles. Those of you who are more keen on rides that will take you across the country or maybe abroad may prefer to fit Bridgestone BT56 tyres. Which while not as sticky as Azaros are still impressive and should last over twice as long, reaching a good 4500 miles. The Bridgestone tyres make excellent all-rounders. But if your best mate has just treated himself to an R1 Yamaha then you might just want to consider the Avons! You will find that the 16 inch front wheel dictates tyre choice to some extent.

The light weight of the FireBlade will really come into its own riding on the crowded English roads with the inevitable stop-start as you back off and then open up the throttle, waiting patiently for Mr Dozy in the Mondeo to decide what he's doing. And you will find the finish on the Honda very good, making cleaning easier. The exception is the decals which are a bit tacky. The engine can

be a bit buzzy at certain speeds but you get to know these and ride around them.

Touring is also an option with the FireBlade. The best luggage results are found by fitting a Baglux or similar tank cover and placing one of their excellent tankbags upon it. You can supplement this with throw-over panniers or by tying a soft bag to the rear end. You should be able to carry plenty of socks for one this way. I've no doubt there are some out there who have found some ingenious way of making the FireBlade look like a touring bike and have managed to go touring two-up. Look, there is no grab rail and the pillion seat is almost invisible. The FireBlade is not a Pan-European, so stop it now – you look really silly! One-up touring is fine with enough comfort to keep riding all day. One-up touring also means you can make the most of the 180 mile tank range, stopping when it suits you.

Servicing takes place around 4000 miles (now you see the sense in using Bridgestone tyres) and will set you back around £125 if you go to a good mechanic. Which is recommended unless you know what you're doing, as the spark plugs are a real nightmare to get out.

Worthwhile modifications include K&N air filters, coupled with Dynojets, which will be a positive aid to smooth carburation. Most Japanese bikes run a bit lean – especially in the midrange, which aids emission figures no end! The K&N air filters coupled to fuel jet changes courtesy of Dynojet will correct the mixture across the engine's rev. range making for smoother running, better pick-up and a cooler running engine.

At the same time that your favourite mechanic is adjusting the carburation, a Remus end can for the exhaust system will aid gas flow. A hugger mudguard at the back end will to help protect the rear suspension linkage and give you somewhere to put your favourite stickers!

That only leaves the chain to adjust and lube at regular intervals. And to ask whoever is servicing the FireBlade for you to include a good greasing of the rear suspension linkage, especially if October has just pulled out in front of you and your only answer is to park the FireBlade in the garage

READERS' WHEELS

until next May!

Laying up bikes for the winter seems to have become the norm. For heaven's sake get some advice if you haven't done it before. At least remove the battery and trickle charge it. Remember most newish bikes will have a sealed for life battery which needs particular attention and gets mighty upset if you let it go flat through running your alarm for months in a dark and forgotten place in the corner of the garage. Unleaded fuel will evaporate and turn to glue in your carburettors. They may be better off run dry. A bit of oil in the petrol left in the fuel tank before you swill it round inside and drain it will help stop it rusting. Lifting tyres off the floor using paddock stands should help too.

The Honda FireBlade is not perfect – no bike is – but in keeping with most modern bikes it has only niggling faults which are easily ignored. Playing out with your mates on a sunny Sunday or going across the Continent for your jolly hols is all perfectly within the stride of the FireBlade. And if you make a wise purchase and look after it you will lose surprising few drinking vouchers when you fancy a change!

***Steve Bergman* / UBG**

WANNA BE A WRITER